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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0755
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0132
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NOUAKCHOTT 000423

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM MR

SUBJECT: MAURITANIAN ELECTION CHRONICLES FOR JUNE 29 --
ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD ON JULY 18

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (SBU) June 29 saw the opposition parties' protest to the Constitutional Council dismissed, with the Council's decision to uphold the election schedule decreed by Prime Minister Laghdaf on June 28 despite the lack of consensus. The Constitutional Council's decision clears the way for the multiple short-cuts to normal electoral procedure needed to secure elections by July 18. The FNDD and RFD camps consulted last night and decided that they would participate in the election campaign on the schedule spelled out by the decree. By 10:00 am both the FNDD's Messaoud Ould Boulkheir and the RFD's Ahmed Ould Daddah had submitted their candidacy papers at the Constitutional Commission. The Tawassoul Islamic party's candidate Mohamed Jemil Ould Mansour reportedly filed later in the day. The candidacy of Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall has yet to be confirmed.

¶2. (SBU) The Superior National Defense Council (the constitutional entity that absorbed the extra-constitutional military High State Council of the coup,) issued a provocative declaration June 28 that offered a justification of the military coup of August 2008. The wholly political statement of the Council runs contrary to the military's argument that the Council is purely military and security focused. Disturbingly, the Council noted that it would continue to operate in conformity with the "constitution and laws" of Mauritania -- dropping the key reference that had been negotiated by President Wade that the Council would be subordinate to the Government of National Unity.

¶3. (SBU) The three political poles will be meeting Monday to finalize the membership of the fifteen-person National Independent Electoral Commission. Each of the three parties will name four representatives. Finding three mutually acceptable members from civil society is proving a challenge.

¶4. (C) The morning meeting of the International Contact Group (ICG) had its normal sparks as the German Ambassador recommended the release of an ICG statement that the July 18 election date was fixed and could not be moved. He further argued that the GNU was now a fully recognized and sovereign government and that the ICG should not interfere in its internal functions. Charge (taking what is now the traditional "other view") responded that the fact that the opposition parties had reluctantly accepted the

Constitutional Council's decision (which, by law cannot be appealed) had resolved the crisis of the day before; however, the crisis had revealed very early the lack of willingness to work in the GNU on a truly consensual basis. The ICG would have to work to help build that consensus. As for the July 18 date, Charge noted we still had to be prepared for delays.

The day before, for instance, the ICG had noted that no donor was in the position to cover the cost of printing the ballots. This would be but one of the challenges that, in a country like Mauritania, might prevent having everything in place on time. The Charge also noted to AU Ambassador Annadif that the Superior National Defense Council's statement was likely to draw complaints from the opposition parties. The French Ambassador agreed that the move was "infantile" and a way for Aziz to show "he is still around" but he dismissed the action as "part of the political game."

¶15. (C) The collective ICG paid a courtesy visit to Interim President Ba M'Bare that had little substance but much symbolism. At the French Ambassador's suggestion, Annadif had asked that the meeting take place at the Presidency to emphasize that there was no vacancy in the office of the presidency. Although originally scheduled as such, the diplomatic motorcade was waved away at the gates of the Presidency towards the Senate Chambers where the meeting took place (in M'Bare's small private office, where the dip corps had to step over furniture to sit down). Even among the Europeans, there were comments that "they" were not yet ready to let M'Bare feel too confident in his seat. The presence of Foreign Minister Ould Mohamedou in the meeting lent the

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distinct impression M'Bare was being monitored to be sure he did not say anything of substance -- which he did not.

¶16. (C) Charge Comment -- It's All Politics: The role of the ICG is sure to be complicated in the weeks to come as all parties make political ploys geared towards the campaign. While the Aziz camp may be the most outrageous from our perspective, the opposition camp is not immune. The concerns raised yesterday about the insufficient time available for filing candidacies in the end proved baseless as both Ould Boulkheir and Ould Daddah had their files ready to go this morning. Concern about the July 18 date is as much about face as about substance since it is important to see Aziz "lose" on an issue of paramount importance to him. The attachment to the July 18 date is for Aziz also less about the principles of the Dakar Accord as an opportunity to limit the chance of rivals -- particularly Vall -- to rally against him. The country has, of course, been in political hyper-drive since August 2008 giving the Mauritanian people ample opportunity to understand the choice before them. Vall, who kept his council private until just a few weeks ago, is perhaps somewhat disadvantaged but he is certainly well known (Mission contacts who we know to be strongly anti-coup still suggest they will support Vall despite his recognized corrupt practices because he is "strong" - a trait that may still prove more important than "honest" or "democratic" come election time.)

¶17. (C) Comment Continued: The evident U.S. / European splits in the ICG are unfortunate but predictable given the differing approaches to Mauritania over the past few months. Unless provoked by public statements that we cannot accept (the German behaved himself today with President M'Bare) we will do our best to maintain public solidarity. We are impressed with Ambassador Annadif who is doing a fine job keeping peace between the Mauritanian political parties as well as his fellow mediators. We will continue working to ensure the ICG recognizes the good and bad of all parties. While it is fair to say that the FNDD and RFD were not acting entirely in good faith in waiting to raise the election date until after the GNU had been created (although raising it earlier would probably have scuttled any chance of Wade succeeding in Nouakchott), it must also be recognized that Prime Minister Laghdaf clearly violated his prior commitments

to neutrality when he was unable to find consensus on the electoral calendar -- he should have brought it to the ICG at that point. Likewise, the military have already publicly distanced themselves from the previous acceptance of civilian oversight nearly before the ink on the last High State Council statement has dried. If anyone but Aziz wins, the willingness to dismiss the Aziz camp faults will not matter. If he wins, however, we already see a list of valid complaints that will make it hard to simply sign off on the elections. The rest of the ICG is watching the tensions grow between the two overtly stated positions. As we get closer to the end game, we may well have to work as closely within as outside the ICG to get a fair and accurate assessment of the elections.

¶8. (C) Some More: As the campaign takes off, we will be watching closely to see if and how quickly support drains away from General Aziz. There does not seem to be much genuine public support for Aziz beyond what he can pay for. Vall may be well placed to draw away Aziz's support (assuming he survives the potentially explosive but expected challenge to his candidacy on the grounds of still being an active duty military officer -- despite his effort months ago to resign).

The two cousins hail from the same influential tribe renowned for its business sense. Surely, the tribe's leadership has already decided which candidate is in their interest. Vall and Aziz are both traditional Mauritanian politicians who will work to line up traditional leaders, tribal chiefs and other "notables." They will play well outside of Nouakchott and the other bigger cities. Ould Daddah and Ould Boulkheir will play better in the cities where tribal influences may not be as determinant in how voters decide who to vote for. In a free and fair election,

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it really is anybody's game at this point.
HANKINS